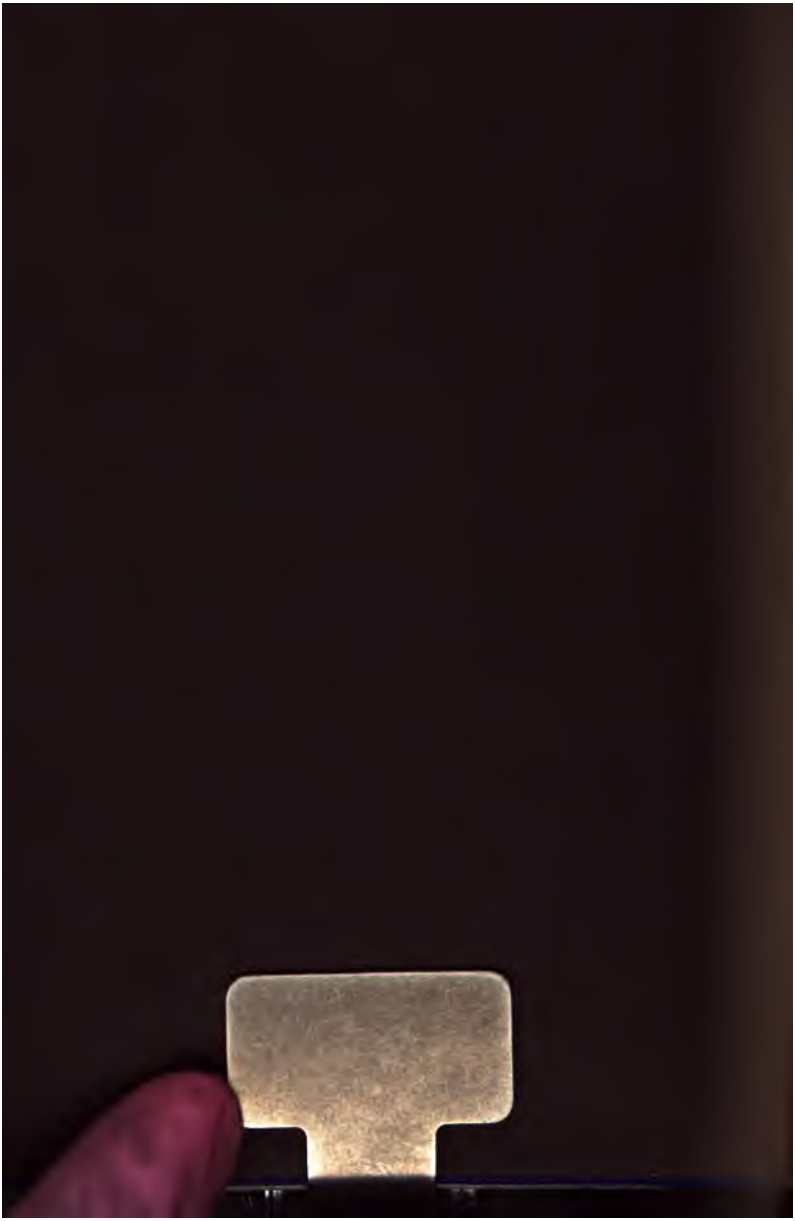
EN DEUS



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EN DEUS:

An Essay

ON

SOME ELEMENTS OF CHRISTIAN EVIDENCE.

BY

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INCUMBENT OF ALYTH AND MEIGLE.

"He that believeth in the Son of God hath the witness in himself."—1 ST JOHN, v. 10.

EDINBURGH:

R. GRANT & SON, PRINCES STREET.

LONDON: RIVINGTONS.

MDCCCLXX.

EN DEUS.

L'ENVOI.

Oh! for the firm, unfaltering faith
  Of days gone by,
The love that blazed through storm and wraith
  And would not die.

Oh! for the lightning gaze that clave
  The heaven above,
The hope that peril, surging wave on wave,
  Could never move.

Oh! for the trust that calmly braved
  The world's dark frown,
That loved not life to death, but craved
  The martyr's crown.

We need them all, for darkly now
  The battle lowers,
And close and eager press the foe
  Around our towers.

High are our walls, our bulwarks strong
  And gates secure,
And fails not, though it tarry long
  His promise sure.

But all may fail, and all be vain
  If hearts untrue
Are in the hold—hearts that would fain
  Themselves undo.

Alas! and can we say that we
  Have never failed?
Have we not doubted? turned to flee
  With hearts that quailed?

Oh! hear my cry, my head I bow
  In shame and grief;
Lord! I believe, O Lord! help Thou
  Mine unbelief.

I.

In days of controversy like these—controversy which surges round the very foundations of the faith—it is often difficult to prevent a kind of dreamy half-doubtfulness from stealing over us; and, in spite of ourselves, there will rise up in the mind at times, like a terrible spectre to be turned away from with a shudder, the dismal

thought, "What if Christianity should not be true!" When this happens, we must turn from ourselves to the evidences of the faith. When doubt has gained an entrance to the citadel, it is not safe to trust the garrison; we must seek help. And God has not left Himself without witness. The evidences of the Christian religion are ample and indisputable. Most Christians, however, have to take external evidence upon trust. They have neither time nor opportunity for searching out the historical proofs of the authenticity and genuineness of the Scriptures, or for going through the mass of collateral and confirmatory evidence which attests the credibility and trustworthiness of the writers. They are obliged to leave this to men of learning and men of leisure, and accept the result of their labours.

But the moral excellency of the Bible, the image of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, the fitness of Christianity as a means to an end, and its perfect adaptation to the condition and wants of man—not man in one clime or age, but the universal human family

always and everywhere,—these marks of the divine hand are visible to all, and can be known and read of all men.

There is a complete analogy, in this respect, betwixt natural and revealed religion. The laws that regulate the motions of the heavenly bodies, their relative size and distance, the effects they produce upon each other, the wonderful way in which apparently opposing forces control and modify one another,—all this can be thoroughly mastered only by the philosopher and the man of science; but the simplest herd-boy, musing on the hillside, can see the glory of God in the firmament, and can lift up his soul, in the words of the Hebrew Psalmist, "I will consider thy heavens, even the works of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained."

And just in the same way, though it requires learning and labour, and some considerable power of mind, to grapple successfully with "oppositions of science falsely so called," and to demonstrate the truth and certainty of the Christian revelation, it requires no learning, no

labour, no cultivation of intellect or power of mind at all, but simply humility, and faith, and love, to receive with meekness the engrafted word which is able to save our souls.

II.

The evidences of the faith, like the faith itself, begin, and centre, and end in Christ. Without any doubt or controversy, our blessed Lord was the most marvellous person the world ever saw. Believers and unbelievers are agreed on this point. Whether we consider His own account of Himself, or the way in which He verified that account, nothing in the history of the human race can, for a single instant, bear comparison with the life and ministry of Christ. He is the Son of God. With authority He commands the unclean spirits, and they obey Him. He rebukes the winds and the waves, and immediately there is a great calm. He heals the sick, raises the dead, reads the inmost thoughts.

But He is also the Son of man. He is subject to His parents. He is touched with compassion, wounded by unkind and unjust treatment, grieved at the hardness of men's hearts, moved to tears at the grave of the departed, troubled in spirit at the thought of desertion and betrayal, prostrated by unknown agony in the garden, crying with a loud voice upon the cross.

These two characters seem, at first sight, diametrically opposed to one another, and it is certain that no one could have sustained both unless he had been both; and yet, during the whole of our Lord's recorded life, not one word or action can be pointed out which is not perfectly and absolutely consistent. The temptations of the evil one assailed Him on both sides: "If thou be the Son of God, command these stones that they be made bread"—"If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down." If either of these temptations had succeeded, our Lord would not have been the Son of man. He had taken upon Himself the human nature with its infirmities and conditions, and to accept either of the devil's subtle suggestions, would have

been equivalent to putting off these, and giving up the work He had come into the world to do.

Again, "All these things will I give thee if thou wilt fall down and worship me." To have yielded to this temptation would have shown that our Lord was not the Son of God; for how could He, who thought it not robbery to be equal with God, have grasped at earthly dignity and power?

Our Lord also claims to give a perfect revelation of the whole will of God as regards conduct, and to afford a perfect pattern of the fulfilment of that will. He is a teacher sent from God—a teacher whose lessons are intended, not for a peculiar people, but for all the world—not for one age or epoch, but for all time; and the records of His teaching amply ratify and confirm the claim. Were ever lessons so lofty conveyed in words so worthy; doctrines so sublime clothed in language so simple; truths so all important made so universally attractive? Eighteen centuries have rolled away since the Sermon on the mount was spoken, yet not one word has lost its original power. It never waxes old; it never

will wax old. It bears upon its every line the palpable authority of God Himself.

More than three thousand generations of mankind have lived, and died, and passed away, since the parables of the Redeemer were spoken. To every one of those passing generations they have been as fresh, as full of life and power, as to those who listened when they fell from the Saviour's lips. What repenting sinner has not wept and rejoiced by turns, as he read the story of the returning prodigal; of the shepherd who went and searched for his wandering sheep, *until he found it;* of joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth!

Not one discourse, however, or a series of parables, but the whole collective teaching of our Lord, bears the same character of universality. Though but, as some tell us, the words of a Jewish peasant, spoken in the first instance to a nation separated by law, and custom, and prejudice, and narrow pride, from all the world; yet now, at this distance of time, when spread through the world and scattered amongst all nations, not one word has become obsolete, not

a touch has been found untrue to nature, not an utterance which does not still wake an echo in the universal breast of man. How could this be unless the evangelist's words were true, "He knew what was in man?" As regards the revelation of a perfect religious system, and the exemplification of its perfection in His own person, the possibility of either of these undertakings, still less both, being successfully carried out is inconceivable on the supposition that our Lord was anything else or anything less than "God manifest in the flesh." The history of the world presents no other instance. We run our eye down the dim page of antiquity, and here and there our gaze is arrested by illustrious names. Some of these men gave laws, others philosophy; but their laws are obsolete, and their philosophy forgotten. None of them founded or attempted to found a religion. Their influence was local and transient, and never reached the common life of men. And if we look into their lives, we find that the best of them were cruel, the wisest of them superstitious, the loftiest and purest of their moral

writers degraded by vanity and debased by crime. But from an obscure corner of the earth we hear a voice saying, "I am the light of the world," and from that spot, as from a centre, the light spreads and grows, and increases in illuminating power, penetrating the gloom and chasing away the darkness, and shining more and more as the world moves onwards to the perfect day.

III.

The Christian world has lately been startled by the appearance of a very striking book, professing to be the attempt of one who, discontented with modern views of Christ and Christianity, endeavours to find out for himself, from the first three Gospels only, without aid or hindrance from the literature of the Christian Church, who Christ was, and what the system He intended to found. The perplexity caused by the book—a perplexity which still exists—is, whether the author is or is not, in the com-

mon acceptation of the word, a Christian, and whether his work is an attempt to build up Christianity or to pull it down.

The view of the intention and work of our blessed Lord given in the book above referred to is certainly, and indeed confessedly, incomplete; but there can be no doubt that it is, in substance, true and sound. The author distinctly and repeatedly states that the aim and work of Christ was the regeneration of human society and the human race, by means of—1st, A new law, the law of love, exemplified and illustrated by His own life and death; and 2ndly, A new *power*, an indwelling of a divine life, proceeding from Himself, animating and elevating His members by the inspiration of His own Spirit. Now, whether these two statements have been deliberately laid down as a foundation on which to build, or have been made half inadvertently, and without a due consideration of their comprehensiveness and force, upon this depends whether the writer be indeed an enemy or a friend; for these two statements contain the essence of Christianity, and are incompatible

with any idea of Christ except that which regards Him as the Son of God. He who claims to rule and guide His universal Church to the end of time, not by word only, but by living and abiding influence, claims to be more than a teacher sent from God. A divine power can be imparted only by a divine person. He who promises to be with us always, even to the end of the world, not ideally but truly, not by the force of law and doctrine, published and delivered once for all, but by His Spirit which abideth in us, promises that which can be fulfilled only by God Himself. It might easily be shown that upon this foundation the whole Christian faith sufficiently and firmly rests. It is no argument against any Christian doctrine to say that it was not taught by Christ, or held by the first Christians. As the whole of Christian duty is involved and included in the one law of love, the one new commandment given by Christ, so the whole Christian faith is involved and included in the Person, the personal promises, and the personal claims of Christ.

Take, for instance, the doctrine of the Trinity.

Our Saviour was, manifestly, a divine Person; but He was sent by One greater than Himself, He tells us: while of that One greater than Himself He says, "I and my Father are one." Again, He promises to send another Person, or if we say an influence or power, we must keep in mind that this influence or power has very distinct and definite individuality, possesses and exercises the incommunicable attributes of Deity, is omnipotent and omnipresent, searches and knows the hearts of all men. This divine power, this divine Person, Christ sends, and yet, in the very act of sending, He Himself comes, and is present with us always.

There are therefore three Persons, each possessing, equally, all power in heaven and on earth, each equally and evidently God, so distinct that one sends and is sent by another, yet so united that the presence of one involves and *is* the presence of all three—so that, though we find not in Holy Scripture the expression, "Unity in Trinity, and Trinity in unity," yet we do find the doctrine, and by it are enabled to understand the language of St

Paul, "Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are differences of administration, but the same Lord; and there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God that worketh all in all." Manifold and multifarious as are the manifestations of divine grace and divine power, "all these worketh that one and the self-same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will."

And as this one truth, the presence of Christ by His Spirit, is the sufficient foundation of belief as regards the collective Christian Church, so is it the one and only foundation for faith and hope to the individual Christian soul. That our blessed Lord was a marvellous Person; that He effected alone a marvellous work, which ages of philosophers and philosophy had essayed in vain; that He has bequeathed to us a system of morality so simple and yet so perfect, as to have superseded by universal consent all other systems that the world had seen, —in all this, and much more of the same kind that might be added, though there is much to be admired, and indeed adored, yet

there is nothing to feed the spirit, nothing to give rest to the soul. But that the same merciful and loving Lord, who lived and died for us, still lives and is present with us—present with us not only to teach, but also to help—not only to enlighten, but also to uphold—not only to guide, but also to enable,—this it is which can carry us through the changes and chances of this present time; this it is that can give us comfort in sorrow, strength in trial, confidence in danger, victory in the day of battle; this it is that can gild even the gloom of the dark valley, and open to us the gates of a glorious and blissful immortality beyond the grave.

IV.

We hear much about the disagreement of science and religion. A great deal of this is purely imaginary, arising from arrogance and undue assumption on one side, and timidity and want of accurate information on the other.

Between the ascertained facts of science and the direct statements of Scripture there is no discrepancy whatever, though there is very direct and distinct antagonism betwixt the fancies of scientific writers and the ideas usually drawn from holy Writ. Perhaps the most marked instance of this is with regard to the history and progress of the human race. The writers alluded to represent man as existing first in a savage state, gradually becoming civilised and polished, rising higher and higher in the social and intellectual scale, and the heathen world reaching its highest pinnacle of glory in the Augustan age—the age immediately before Christ.

Scripture, on the other hand, sets man before us in the age after the flood, standing on a moral eminence, and then gradually corrupting his way upon the earth, gradually becoming more and more confused in his knowledge of God and goodness, until he has changed the truth of God into a lie; commencing with full knowledge of the being and attributes of Jehovah; by-and-by worshipping the host of heaven,

then men, then devils, then birds and four-footed beasts and creeping things; nay, adoring the very slime left by the subsiding waters of his sacred river: and during all this time, as he departed further and further from the Father of lights, plunging deeper and deeper in moral darkness, until the whole Gentile world had reached the condition so graphically described by St Paul in his Epistle to the Romans. So that the charge addressed by the Saviour to the same apostle represented no unreal work, but the true task given him to do, "to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God."

So also as regards material progress,—the arts and appliances of life. People talk about the prehistoric man, ignorant of the use of metals, shaping his weapons of flint, living in holes under ground, then in rude huts, and only after ages had passed away constructing for his family a decent dwelling.

Scripture, on the other hand, represents the age after the Flood as an age of civilization and culture,—an age of great cities,—and tells us

that even before the Flood there were artificers in brass and iron.

Scripture also represents the progress of the nations of the earth as a progress downwards. Daniel said to Nebuchadnezzar, "Thou art this head of gold. And after thee shall arise a kingdom inferior to thee, and another third kingdom of brass, which shall bear rule over all the earth, and the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron," and the next state of this fourth kingdom is represented by iron and clay, "partly strong and partly broken."

The sum of all this, is that we find Scripture representing man, left to himself, tending downwards; the philosophy that is opposed to Scripture tells us that he has raised himself, by the development of his own unaided powers, from a condition little removed from that of the lower animals. The question then is, which of these two accounts is true? Which is most in accordance with common experience and common sense? Which is borne out by the evidence of facts?

If there were any soundness in the progres-

sive advance theory, we should see something analogous to it going on now. There are plenty of savage races in the world still. Alas! that it should be so, but so it is. We have before our eyes the red man of America, the aborigines of New Zealand and Australia, the Caffre, the Hottentot, and the Negro, and many more besides; and I assert positively, without fear or possibility of contradiction, that there is not one savage or semi-savage race on the face of the earth which can be shown to have advanced one step, by its own efforts, within the memory of man. Such a fact as this, if we are to be guided by common experience and common sense, disposes of the progressive advance theory at once. If it were true, as some dream, that man was placed on this earth by his Creator in a state of nature, as they call it; that he first found out for himself a language, and then, as time went on, developed into the refined and intellectual being presented to us in the earlier pages of classical antiquity; if there were any truth in this vain imagination, the same process would be re-

peated still. Man is still man. Given, the same being, under the same conditions, and the same result must needs follow. So far from this, however, savage races retrograde, degenerate, dwindle away, die out. Even civilized nations, ignorant of Christianity, go back instead of forward. Look at Turkey,—that foul blot upon the face of Europe,—existing by sufferance, dying of inbred decay. Look at the Chinese, boasting a civilization older than Abraham, unable to use the instruments, or even to understand the astronomical calculations of their distant ancestors! What have we in all the East save the dim reflection of a magnificence that has passed away!

And so it was also with the so much vaunted glories of the Augustan age. Rome then was very much in the same state, politically, in which France is now. The whole commonwealth had been torn in pieces by civil discords. The best and bravest citizens had perished either on the field of battle or by proscription. Augustus, striding over the dead bodies of the men who had helped him to rise,

seized the reins, and held them with a firm grasp. Rome was a Republic: he changed it to an Empire. By concentrating all the powers of the state in his own person, he gave the appearance of solidity and strength; but beneath the surface all was hollowness and rottenness—venality and profligacy from court to cottage.

In the provinces the name of Rome was still a power in the world, a power whose magic caused the thongs to start from the wrists of St Paul, and made the chief captain afraid because he had bound him. Those terrible iron legions, that, as Daniel foretold they would, had broken in pieces and subdued all things, had left a name behind them at which the inhabitants of the world still trembled. But by and by it was found out that the legions existed no longer. The iron had become mixed with clay. Rome not only ceased to conquer, she failed to hold her own. Next, the barbarian hordes rushed in and mingled all things in one common ruin.

The history of the world, therefore,—the com-

mon experience of mankind,—contradicts the theory of progressive development. So far as we have any trace, in profane history, from the Flood to the coming of Christ, the tendency was downwards, and not upwards. Let those who doubt this compare for a moment Greece and Rome together, and tell us whether the men of the generation of Cicero will bear comparison with the contemporaries of Pericles; or whether the heroes sung by Virgil can be spoken of in the same breath with those who crowd the page of Homer. To compare Æneas with Ulysses is but to make the former appear meaner and more contemptible than he truly is. And yet both poets present us with a picture which is no doubt approximately true; for the mind of man can no more create than the hand of man. It can but group together existing forms. Whether we take, then, the witness of history or of poetry, we find the same palpable fact—the fact, viz., that the ages before Christ of which we have written records more ages of decline, ages during which the moral and intellectual stature of man dwindled

and became dwarfed. So also as to the physical aspect of the question. The witness of ancient statuary is not development, but degeneracy; and the same may be said of material remains. The most ancient nations have left behind them the most enduring records. Look at the Pyramids of Egypt. Ancient Babylon, for stupendous magnificence, stands alone. The grandest things in pagan Rome were hoary with an antiquity older than the Romans. The Cloaca Maxima, *e.g.*, must have been the work of a mightier and more highly civilized people than the alleged founders of the seven-hilled city.

Whatever stand-point we take, then, the same spectacle meets us—a spectacle of degeneration and decay; a spectacle which is but a continued and repeated illustration of the truth of those scriptures which affirm the fall of man, and the corruption of human nature. For what is the secret of all this decadence, this perpetual and invariable determination downwards? If, undazzled by outward glitter, we look closely at the history of ancient empires, we find march-

ing side by side with their advance in material wealth and power, a dark shadow, which gradually overspreads their greatness and glory, enshrouds them with a dense and deepening cloud, and finally involves them in total and irremediable eclipse. This evil power which overcame, and engulphed in ruin, and brought to utter perdition, the nations and cities of the ages before Christ—what was it? Simply moral corruption! simply the developed fruit of that universal tendency to evil which is natural to fallen man; a developed fruit whose ultimate rottenness in the case of heathen Rome, was so inconceivably loathsome that we shrink and shudder as we glance at it even now.* Since

* "The pages of Suetonius remain as an eternal witness of the abysses of depravity, the hideous intolerable cruelty, the hitherto unimagined extravagances of nameless lust that were then manifested on the Palatine."—*Lecky's History of European Morals*, vol. i. p. 276.

"It was the most frightful feature of the corruption of ancient Rome that it extended through every class of the community.—*Idem*, vol. i. p. 277.

"It is well for us to look on such facts as these. They display more vividly than any mere philosophical disquisition, the abyss of depravity into which it is possible for human nature to sink. They furnish us with striking proofs

the introduction of Christianity we grant, nay, we contend, that the history of the world has been a history of regeneration, of moral as well as material progress, of gradual emancipation from evil and continual approximation to good. And this is one main evidence of the truth of our religion.

V.

"For this purpose the Son of God was manifested," St John tells us, "that He might destroy the works of the devil." Some fanciful people affect to disbelieve in the existence of the devil. But no sane person disputes the existence of evil. That evil must have had some beginning; that beginning must have had a cause; and we can conceive of no cause which is not connected with personality. The third chapter of Genesis does not reveal to us more clearly than

of the reality of the moral progress we have attained, and they enable us in some degree to estimate the regenerating influence that Christianity has exercised in the world . . . —*Idem*, vol. i. p. 299.

does our own experience, that there is a will, a working, and a power in the world, at variance with God and goodness. All fruits of this evil principle are works of the devil. He may not be the actual perpetrator of each wicked act; he may not be the actual prompter of every evil thought; but all the evil that is in the world has flowed from that first rebellious act of which he was the instigator, and, therefore, all evil works are rightly described as works of the devil. The declared object and intention of Christianity is to counteract and crush all this evil, and its claims may be fairly submitted to the test of success or failure. If the gospel were a mistake, it could not come from God. If the precepts of the gospel were such as to increase the misery or cramp the happiness of man, we should have good reason for rejecting it. Declaring itself to be "glad tidings of great joy," if it showed itself in its results to be something very different from this, it could not be the "glorious gospel of the blessed God." But if we find from the history of our religion, and from the history of the world since that religion was

promulgated, that the declared object of the gospel is indeed attained by the spread of the gospel, that as for this purpose the Son of God was manifested that He might destroy the works of the devil, so wherever the Son of God is manifested, He does destroy the works of the devil, then we have another argument, and a most powerful one, for the divine authority of Christianity.

In pursuing our enquiry, the first necessary step is to gain some view of the world without Christ. We have a terrible picture drawn by St Paul in the first chapter of his Epistle to the Romans; a picture the truthfulness of which is amply confirmed by the heathen poets and satirists of the time.

Many amongst us are unwilling to believe this. There is a disposition in the world, as old as Solomon, to depreciate the present time in comparison with the past; and so men talk of the golden and silver ages that have gone and can never return. Solomon knew better. "Say not why were the former times better than these, for thou dost not enquire wisely concern-

ing this." Still, the disposition is so strong as to be almost universal. "Our thoughts still cling to the mouldering past." Especially is this the case in ecclesiastical matters. Almost every great commotion or schism has been caused by an endeavour to galvanize into artificial life some dead idea of the past, to clothe it in its moth-eaten garments, and expect it to move, and work, and act upon mankind as in the days when it was a living power. In this country large numbers dream of the days and men of the Covenant, and think that the religious life of the world has grown dull and feeble, because the same controversies that then nerved men with stern resolve, and shook whole communities with fierce excitement, do not move as now. Others go back to the Reformation, others to the first Christian ages, and speak as if the men of their favourite eras were intellectual and moral giants, in whose presence we pigmies of the present day must hide our diminished heads and shrink into insignificance. All this is fallacy. In every age of the Church God has had a work to be done, and

his chosen instruments to do it. We may not see their work; we might not recognise it as God's work if we did see it; but by their fruits they shall be known hereafter. "Men do not gather figs of thorns, or grapes of thistles." Every man whose life and work helps forward the great Gospel principle of love, weakens those artificial barriers that separate man from man, and assists in bringing on the time when Christians, all over the world, shall join with one mind and one mouth in saying, "Our Father which art in heaven"—every such man is a true apostle of the Lamb, and shall receive the welcome, "well done good and faithful servant."

Precisely the same feeling that causes many to look for heroes in past ages of the Church, carries others, farther back still, to ages before Christianity. They bury themselves in that wonderful Greek and Roman literature. They gaze enraptured upon the noble architecture, the exquisite statuary of classical antiquity. They cannot bring themselves to believe that the men who trod those tesselated pavements,

whose genius and skill produced those gems of art, of which we possess only the fragments, could be anything else, or anything less, than models of intellectual refinement and moral elevation. Alas! "'tis distance lends enchantment to the view." We have but to draw near, and we find that St Paul's is the true representation, and that he sums up justly in the emphatic words, "hateful and hating one another."

Dark, however, as the painting is, we can never, at this distance of time, detect its darkest shadows. The gilded frame and the prominent figures are all we can clearly see. We gather only a confused and indistinct idea of the background and body of the picture. What can have been the condition of things where the majority of the population were slaves—slaves not belonging to a degraded or inferior race, but a large proportion of them differing from their masters only in the accident of slavery—the master having absolute control over the slave's person, and unquestioned power of life and death! The condition of the many affords

the truest test of national elevation—a nation may have great men, able generals, brilliant orators, noble poets, illustrious rulers, but what avails all this if, beneath the gilded crust, there is a seething mass of degraded and degrading misery!

Again, it cannot be doubted that the surest index of the moral condition of any people is afforded by the objects of their worship: and if we look into the different heathen mythologies, and see what false gods were worshipped when Christ came into the world, we find that darkness had indeed covered the earth, and thick darkness the people. The Roman Jupiter was a monster of cruelty and lust, and amongst those who shared with him the Roman worship were representations of almost every vice that can degrade humanity. And as were the gods so was their worship. "It is a shame," St Paul says, "even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret"—in the secret rites, *i.e.*, of their idolatrous religion.

If we turn from the centres of civilization to the ruder parts of the world, we find the dark

places of the earth full of the habitations of cruelty. All over Europe, and amongst the inhabitants of our own country, human sacrifices were common; and such was the character of their deities as to verify St Paul's words, "the things which the gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils and not to God." In Africa, so far as Africa was known, which was only along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, it was the same; in fact, the whole of the then known world, except Judea, was held in bondage by debasing and cruel superstition, "led captive by the devil at his will."

The revolting features of the world's religion were reproduced in the world's morality. Flowing from a polluted spring, how could the stream be pure! The words of the fifty-third Psalm afford only too faithful a delineation of the condition to which the human family had sunk when Christ came. "The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God. Corrupt are they, and have done abominable iniquity: there is none that doeth good. God looked down from heaven upon the children of men to see if there were

any that did understand, that did seek God. Every one of them is gone back; they are altogether become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one."

And now, has not the manifestation of the Son of God gone far to destroy the works of the devil? It is true this is still an evil world—a world in which evil has the upper hand. Oppression still wields the lash. Grim-visaged war still desolates the earth. The midnight robber and the midday murderer are still abroad. The depraved still corrupt the innocent. The strong still crush the weak. The avaricious man still grinds the faces of the poor. The time seems far removed from us when the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid . . . . when nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." All this seems far away from us; and yet, wherever the light of the gospel has penetrated, the darkness has been rolled away, and the idols have been utterly abolished. Wherever the Sun of Righteousness has shone it has been with healing in His wings; and to

whole nations and countries the words of St Paul may be addressed, "Such were some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the spirit of our God."

But we are told that all this is due, not to the influence of Christianity, but to the general enlightenment and civilization of mankind! Nothing of the sort. It is due simply and solely, directly and entirely, to Christianity—to the manifestation of the Son of God, and to nothing else. As regards mere knowledge, the light of human intellect, the ancient Greeks and Romans were as far advanced as we are. We apply our knowledge more extensively, and, of course, in the mechanical arts each succeeding generation advances and improves. But the principles of mathematical and logical science, that is to say, the primary and essential elements of human knowledge, were as familiar to the ancients as they are to ourselves. In these they are our teachers still. The one difference betwixt them and us, from which all other differences flow, is, that they worshipped devils

and we worship God, we have the gospel and they had it not.

The destruction of the works of the devil was immediate. In the very first century after Christ, throughout whole provinces of the Roman empire, the temples were deserted and the idols left without worshippers. And during generations of relentless persecution, thousands of Christians endured torture and death, not accepting deliverance, rather than go back to the defilements and debasements of heathenism; and still the destruction of the works of the devil went on, idols fell, temples tottered, altars crumbled into dust, until at length the little leaven had leavened the whole lump, the idols were no more, the temples were Christian temples, and the words of Malachi had received their fulfilment: "From the rising of the sun, even unto the going down of the same, my name shall be great among the Gentiles, and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering, for my name shall be great among the Gentiles."—Mal. i. 2.

We must make, indeed, one admission.

Hitherto the success of Christianity has been but partial. The injunction of the Saviour, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature," has never yet been realised—neither has the gospel always been received when preached, or retained even where received with gladness. In some instances Christianity has died out. In Asia Minor and in Africa, churches have become extinct by hundreds. But in admitting this, we admit no more than is involved in the very statement of the question we are now discussing, viz., that there is a will and a working in the world at enmity with God and goodness, which evil principle, and the fruits of it, it is the mission of Christianity to vanquish and destroy. And as the destruction of the works of the devil is gradual, and often fitful, in the individual human soul, so must it be also gradual and sometimes fitful amongst the nations of the earth.

But what a world would this be, if Christianity, true and real, were universal! Suppose a single family, every member of which acts upon Christian principles. There are no heart-

burnings, no jealousies, no envyings, no bitter strife, no reviling one another in this family. All is harmony, because all is sympathy. If one member suffer, the whole suffer with him; if one rejoice, all rejoice together. Love rules in their hearts, and therefore peace abides amongst them—"the peace of God, which passeth all understanding."

Enlarge the picture. Suppose all the inhabitants of a district to be thoroughly and sincerely Christians. There would be an end to all crime in that district; an end to all extortion and oppression; an end to all those miseries that flow from men enriching themselves at the expense of others, or pursuing their own aggrandizement in disregard of others. All hearts would beat with one twofold pulse—holiness to the Lord, charity to one another.

Again, enlarge the picture. Suppose a whole nation to be individually and collectively imbued with Christian principles. There would be an end to all the evils flowing from misgovernment. There would be no oppression, no discontent, no chafing of class against class, no seizing upon

power for selfish ends, no abuse of power from motives of animosity or enmity, no corrupt distribution of public patronage or public money. The common effort would be for the common weal. The whole body fitly framed together, and compacted by that which every joint supplied, would make increase of the body to the edifying of itself in love.

Once more enlarge the picture. Suppose the whole world Christians, not nominally and by profession merely, but in deed and in truth. The blessed time foretold by the prophets would then have truly come, when peace and love and joy shall dwell and reign on earth—when war, and hate, and all the miseries they bring, shall have come to a perpetual end. But from whence would this blessedness arise? Not from the circumstance that all the world was of one religion, but from the essential character of the religion itself. No other religion that the world has seen could ever be universal, nor has the world ever seen another that would be a blessing, if it could.

Still, there are those who say, "We grant all

you advance as to the beneficial effects of Christianity. We know that that religion has been the great civilizer and elevator of humanity. But Christianity is a thing of the past. The human intellect has outgrown it. The theologian must no longer expect to mould the age in which his lot is cast; he must be content to receive his own shape from the stronger life of advanced thought and scientific progress. All that is essential in religious belief we have independently of Christianity. We know that there is but one living and true God. We know His power, His wisdom, and His love from the book of nature. We know, also, what is right and what is wrong, and we believe that in a future state vice shall be punished and virtue rewarded. We are fully persuaded of all this without revelation, and therefere we think the light of nature perfectly sufficient" This is the language of the better sort of unbelievers, whether they call themselves Rationalists, or Positivists, or Deists. To such we reply, "Where did you get all this light? How do you know that there is but one God? How do you know that He is a rewarder

of the just and of the unjust? How do you know what is pleasing to Him, and what is hateful to Him? Whence have you your convictions of a future state? Where did you get all this illumination?" If they cannot answer these questions, we can; for we know that, both in ancient and modern times, the knowledge of God has been confined to those who possessed "the lively oracles of God."

Suppose you are travelling along a dark and dangerous road, full of pits, and bordered by precipices, on which traveller after traveller has perished. Suppose that, after many a fall and many a disaster, wounded, and bruised, and bleeding, you cast yourself down in despair. But one draws near holding a lamp, which casts a bright light upon all things far off and near. He takes you by the hand, raises you up, bathes with soft balm your lacerated limbs, strengthens your heart with wine, and offers to guide you on your way. But you say, "No! I see the road quite plainly now. I can get on quite well. I have no need of you or your lamp. Go away and leave me to myself." Such conduct would

be quite as reasonable as theirs, who can look back upon the history of the world, and speak slightingly of revealed religion. Two epochs especially stand out in bold relief. There was a time, as we all know, when the Christian world was dark, when the corruptions of Rome Pagan were emulated, if not outdone, by Rome Papal. Monsters of iniquity sat in the Papal chair, and crimes were perpetrated by men calling themselves the Vicars of Christ, at the thought of which humanity turns pale.

As Rome was then the centre of Western Christendom, and as men are always readier to copy evil than good, the corruption spread. The general debasement of morals was extreme. Infidelity was rife. The priests were as ignorant as the people, and more wicked. The whole Continent was overspread by darkness worse than heathenism—the darkness of Christianity forgotten.

Now, what was it that rescued the world from this pit of perdition? What was it that chased away the shadows, breathed the voice of joy and health again into the dwellings of the righteous,

and brought to pass that at this day we walk in the light? There is but one answer. It was the Bible. Say it was Wickliffe, Luther, the discovery of printing. All these were but secondary instruments; the great agency was the Bible.

Carrying our eye down the page of time, we have another picture of a different kind, that of a Christian nation deliberately disavowing Christianity, and setting up, by a solemn act of the Legislature, the worship of Reason,—doing, *i.e.*, what we are asked now to do in fact, though not in form. We know what followed. We know how the nation became a nation of wild beasts, thirsting for blood, pouring it out like water. We know that the world never saw before, we earnestly pray that it may never see again, such a spectacle of horror as the first French Revolution.

We see then that, on the one hand, the Bible, the publication of God's Word of truth, brought the Christian world, as it had before brought the heathen world, "from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God." We see also, on the other hand, a whole Christian nation

having put the Bible, and the religion of the Bible, away from them, sinking down at once, not by slow degrees, but at once, into a condition more like that of fiends incarnate, than anything the world had ever seen before.

It is well that we should now and then be reminded of these things. We live in trying and dangerous times. On every side attempts are made to shake our faith in the truth of God's Word. Newspapers, reviews, the most popular works of fiction, the writings of scientific men, the prevailing tone of educated society, all show workings of the same evil leaven. Our only safety is to "keep that which is committed to our trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called, which some professing have erred concerning the faith."

VI.

We live in a wonderful world—a bright, beautiful world. Look at the deep blue of the heavens—let your eye wander over the broad

landscape—mark the green glory of the summer woods—stoop down and scrutinise the soft blending of colour in the expanding rosebud —gaze upon the purple heather, the golden yellow broom, the countless forms and hues of loveliness scattered in rich profusion all about us,—and then say if this world in which we live be not a world of wondrous beauty.

But where is the true wonder? Not so much in the world itself as in the eye that gazes on it; not so much in the colour and form of objects, as in the fact that the varieties of form and colour that meet the eye delight the eye; because here we have the grand fact of adaptation; and the fact that outward objects are adapted to give enjoyment and delight to man, while man is adapted to receive enjoyment and delight from the contemplation of external objects, proves that the world and man are the work of the same hand—that the same Power which said, "Let there be light, and there was light," formed also the marvellous organ that enables us to gaze upon the illuminated face of nature. And if we inves-

tigate the case further, we find that not only in the capacity of vision, but in all his capacities, and in all his requirements, man is adapted to the world and the world to man—not man ages ago only, but man now: not only man wild in the bush or on the prairie, but man in the city, the forge, the factory, finds the world and its productions adapted to his needs. When man was a husbandman, the vine yielded its clusters, the fig and the palm their fruit, to cheer and nourish him. When he became a mighty hunter, the trees of the forest gave him wood, and the bowels of the earth metals wherewith to form his weapons. When he became a dweller in cities, he found ready to his hand the solid granite for his walls, and the richly grained marble for his pillars. With every step in advance there has always been marvellously supplied the means of advancing. Take, as the most familiar illustration of this, that wonderful supply of coal laid up ages ago in the bowels of the earth, without which, so far as we can see, all the mechanical inventions of these generations would have been practi-

cally useless. Finding man and the world in which he lives thus mutually adapted and fitted for each other, we conclude that the same God has created both.

But the argument is capable of far deeper application. Man is not a mere reasoning animal. He is a moral being. He has a spiritual nature—a nature with distinct features and definite needs. Now, if we can show that the Christian revelation is as perfectly adapted to the moral condition of man as the physical creation is to his bodily constitution, then the inference will be direct and irresistible, that the same God who "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul," has also "sent his Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved."

Now, in the first place, the Bible uniformly speaks to man *as a sinner;* as a being alienated by his own wickedness, by the corruption that is in him, and the evil works to which that corruption has led him, from God and goodness. This is a picture of human nature which

no other religious system has ever ventured to draw. It is only in the Bible that man finds this representation of himself. So far were the heathen world from having any such idea, that their very deities were often the impersonation of their vices.

The question to be asked then is, Is this representation true? Is man a sinner? Has he an evil nature?—that is to say, *Does evil come naturally to him, while it costs effort and labour to be good?* There can be but one answer. The conscience of each one tells him that on this point the Word of God is true; that not only is the world lying in wickedness, not only in many things do we offend all, but that, in so far as any one of us has been enabled to overcome evil, or to accomplish good, it has not been from any natural distaste for evil or innate love of goodness, but through the gospel and the grace of God. Secondly, the Bible not only indicates this general condition of man, but points out to us that from it flows, and by it is produced, a deep moral need, a need of pardon, an intense longing for forgive-

ness, an irrepressible yearning after reconciliation—"Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgressions—the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"

And the history of the world, and the condition of the human family, in all ages emphatically endorse this representation. What mean the endless penances and mortifications of false religions and of corrupt Christianity? What mean human sacrifices, and self-mutilation, and self-torture? What are all these things, and all such things, but the efforts of a guilty conscience to appease, and pacify itself—clumsy efforts and unavailing, but amply proving that "the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together."

The gospel, then, truly describes human nature and the condition of man. It is also adapted to that condition. Who can describe

the relief, the peace, the ineffable repose of the soul, long crushed, groaning and travailing under a burden too heavy for it to bear, when it realizes the full force and meaning of the words, "Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world." Yes, here is the true gospel—glad tidings of great joy to all people. The crowned monarch hears it. He has been lying with his face in the dust, conscience stricken before God; but now he has "the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." The captive in the dungeon hears it, and no longer feels his chain. Abraham hears it, as he stretches forth his hand and takes the knife to slay his son,—and lo! a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. God hath provided Himself a burnt-offering. Isaac hears it, as he lies bound upon the altar, and, as the cords are cut asunder, leaps to his feet *saved*, a ransomed and delivered man. His state of mind we can all conceive; and such, in a measure, are the feelings of all who, tied and bound with the chain of their sins, have been by the pitifulness of God's great mercy loosed,

and who can say with truth, "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." And this adaptation of the gospel to the condition and needs of man is universal. "The gospel of the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men." The philosopher, poring over his impossible problems, sees that it solves for him the great problem, "How shall a man be just with God?" The labourer, earning a poor subsistence by the toil of his hands and the sweat of his brow, rejoices in hope of the bread that endures to everlasting life. The luxurious Asiatic, and the hardy Northman, the Negro under a tropical sun, and the Laplander amongst his wastes of snow, have, all and equally, found the gospel the power of God unto salvation. The same touch has awakened the same chord in the universal breast of man, wherever he has been found. Does not this prove that the God who made man has spoken to man? that the revelation which thus fits itself to the universal condition of the human family, meets their universal

needs, satisfies the universal craving of the human spirit, fills up the aching void which nothing else ever has filled, or ever can fill, comes truly and indeed from Him who knoweth whereof we are made, who is the God of the spirits of all flesh?

The gospel is also universally adapted to man as regards time and circumstance. It was preached eighteen hundred years ago, in an obscure corner of the world, amongst a despised people. It has spread and flourished among all nations, and remaining itself unchanged, has accompanied them down the stream of time, gaining with each successive generation a deeper and a firmer hold, displaying continually more and more its adaptation to the constitution and wants of man as a moral and immortal being. Empires have melted away, nations have disappeared, languages have become dead, systems of law and government that were young when Christianity was old have passed away and perished, but the Church of the Redeemer lives and grows,—must live and grow so long as man remains a tenant of this earth.

So also is to circumstance, change of custom, civilization, progress in science and art. The strides in advance made by the human family have never left Christianity behind. Now and then, indeed, those in high places in the Church have become alarmed, and have endeavoured to stop the march of mind, but they have only brought about their own discomfiture. *They* have been left behind, but the religion they thought in peril has remained the queen of the sciences, and not their victim or their slave. The truth is, that the more civilized man becomes, the more qualified he is to appreciate the majesty and beauty of Christianity; the wiser and the more learned any man becomes, the more clearly does he see the folly of wisdom, and the hollowness of knowledge, without the wisdom that is from above, and the knowledge of Christ.

Adapted, then, to the condition, the necessities, the aspirations of man; equally so adapted under all circumstances, and through all time; linking itself with all that is noblest in his nature; strengthening him in weakness, and

comforting him in sorrow; his guide through life, and his hope in death; we conclude that the same God who made man a little lower than the angels, and crowned him with majesty and honour, has also bestowed upon him this inestimable gift, "the glorious gospel of the blessed God."

VII.

Belief in the Providence of God has been the main stay of the spiritual man in all ages. There are those, however, who have persuaded themselves, and endeavour to persuade others, that this is a mistake; that God does not govern the world, but that all things happen in obedience to fixed laws, with which the Creator does not interfere. The next step to this is to assert that God never has interfered, and it is going but a very little further to deny that any God exists to interfere. Once possess the mind with the idea of the self-sustaining powers of nature, and the "self-evolving powers of nature" will soon be a familiar thought.

The doctrine of the immutability, or inviolability rather, of established law, which is proclaimed by some of our advanced thinkers as if it were something new, is but the early Eleatic philosophy clothed in modern phraseology. Xenophanes, born 617 B.C., in his revulsion from the metempsychosis of Pythagoras and the popular religion of his day, said very much the same things as are propounded by philosophizers now. Even Professor Huxley's protoplasm, the newest novelty of materialistic science, may be found in Heraclitus and his predecessors of the same school. So true is it that "there is nothing new under the sun." Progressive development resolves itself, after all, into periodical oscillation. Even in its modern dress, as an objection to Christian miracles and the Christian doctrine of Providence, the theory of invariable law was as familiar to the last generation of unbelievers as it is to the present. And the ultimate result of this revived heathenism is just to reproduce the ancient old world Pantheism, which deified the powers of nature, and made the God of nature an abstraction. We believe that it is the same

almighty and everlasting God that governs all things in heaven and earth; that guides the planets and paints the lily; whose presence fills the universe, and yet without whom not a sparrow falleth to the ground. The same power which brings it to pass that from the juice of the grape shall come wine that maketh glad the heart of man,—that same power, at the marriage feast in Cana of Galilee, caused the water to become wine. The same power that in the beginning caused man to walk upright, gave strength and symmetry to his limbs, grace to his carriage, and nobility to his countenance,—that same power caused the pulse of health and soundness to quiver through the long palsied frame, so that the helpless cripple arose and walked. The same power that ordained that from the tongue of man should flow speech sweeter than honey—alas! that its droppings should so often be bitterness and gall—that same power loosed the strings of the dumb man's tongue, so that he spake plain. The same power that enables the eye to dwell with delight upon the vernal landscape, and the ear

to drink in with rapture the melodies that float upon the summer breeze,—that same power opened the eyes of him that had been born blind, and poured the full tide of sound into the deaf man's ear. The same power that breathed into man's nostrils the breath of life, when man became a living soul,—that same power took by the hand the ruler's little daughter, and straightway she arose; that same power met the mournful procession at the gate of Nain, and restored the dead man to his widowed mother; that same power stood by the grave at Bethany, and spake the words "Lazarus, come forth;" yes, and the same power "that brought again from the dead the Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, shall also quicken our mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in us."

The same power, for there is but one, the power that governs all things in heaven and on earth, governs them not as an earthly potentate, who from some distant part of his dominions issues his decrees, and commits the execution of them to others, but as one who not only with supreme will commands, but with ever-present

hand controls. Mr Lecky, in his exceedingly interesting History of European Morals, states his belief that no doctrine has been productive of so much human misery as the doctrine of a special divine Providence. Surely, the direct opposite of this is the truth. Believing that God governs all things, and that, therefore, all things are working together for good, the Christian goes calmly on his way. Through all the changes and chances of this mortal life, he is a standing fulfilment of those words of the Psalmist, "He shall never be moved; for his heart standeth fast, and believeth in the Lord." Go to the man who walks by faith, whose life is hid with Christ in God, and tell him that you have made discoveries with which the Bible cannot possibly be reconciled. He smiles; *he* has no misgivings. Tell him that the faith of ages is now given up by all thinking men, that the life of the Church is a delusion, and the experience of those who walk with God a dream. Is he moved? You may as well tell him that there is no sun, no sky, no radiant constellations in the midnight heaven. Yes,

the highest, the surest, the safest, the most sustaining evidence of all, is that of a spiritual life, fed by Divine grace, cherished by the Holy Ghost the Comforter. In comparison with this, all other evidences are as the scaffolding to the building. Therefore, let the wise men of the earth dispute; as for thee, my soul, "ACQUAINT THYSELF WITH GOD AND BE AT PEACE."